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ABSTRACT

To help librarians answer patrons' questions about art works, especially paintings, the procedures followed by the reference division of the Suffolk Cooperative Library System are outlined, and a list of reference materials is suggested. Topics covered include biographical information about artists, identification of paintings, location of paintings, methods of valuation and appraisal, and where to sell and where to buy paintings. (SK)

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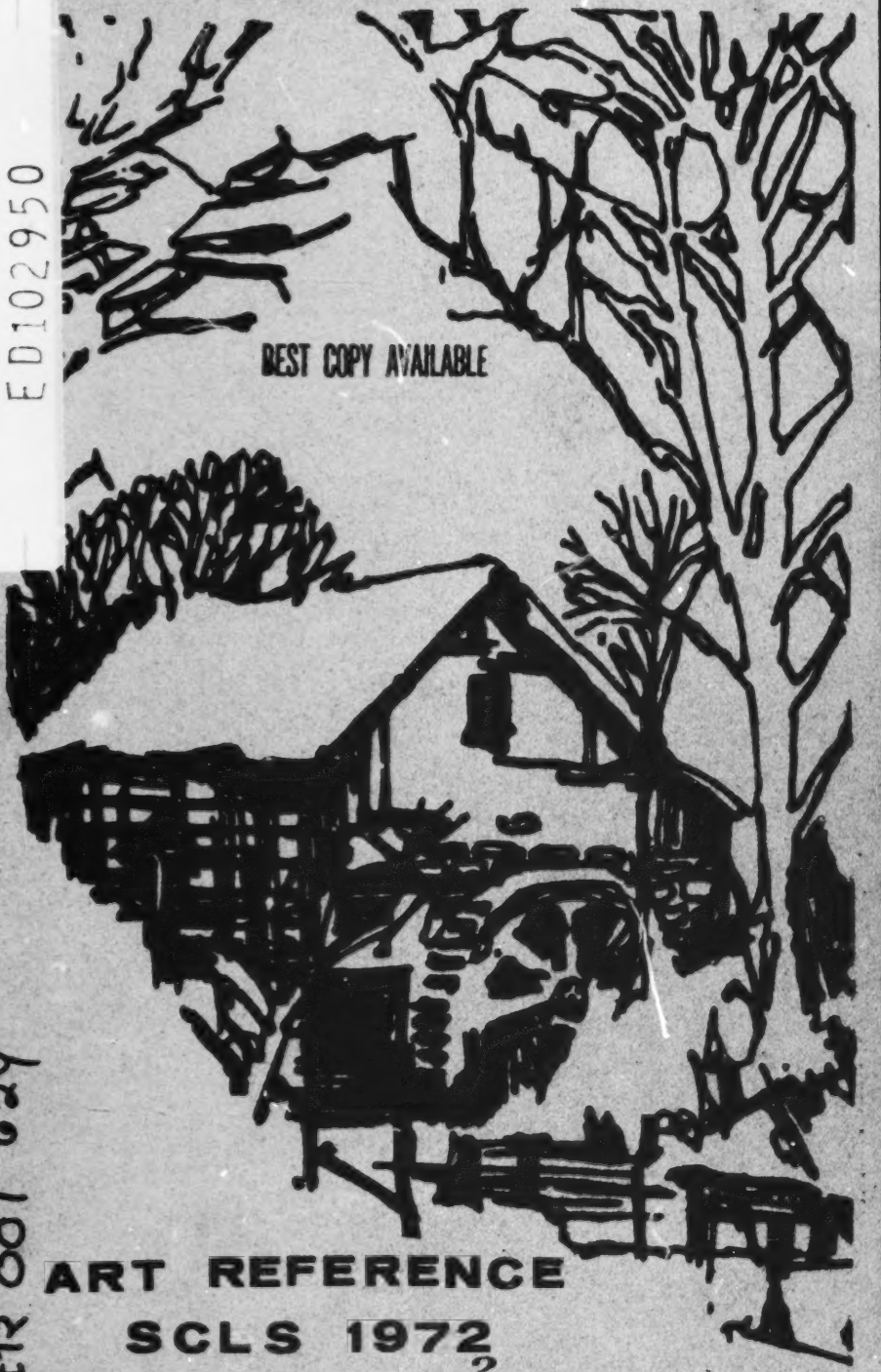

ART REFERENCE

SCLS 1972

IR 001 624

The Reference Division of the Suffolk Cooperative Library System provides an in depth reference and research service for its member libraries. To help reference librarians and others better understand how this works, the following article, concerning only one small subject area, has been written by SCLS staff member Milan Lukac.

As long as people admire and collect art objects, librarians may expect reference questions about artists and the objects they create. High school and college students ask for materials in connection with their assignments in art appreciation courses. But the most sophisticated questions usually come from local antique dealers and professional appraisers. All three groups can be helped, even in the smallest of our libraries. If the patron's query cannot be answered on the spot, a reference form is written out by the librarian, who gathers as much information as possible from the patron. The form is sent to the Reference Division of the Suffolk Cooperative Library System. Here questions are separated for the two central libraries and since we are dealing with art, the question is normally sent to the Patchogue Library.

We feel that a description of the progression in answering questions of this type, as well as a list of the books used, can be helpful to Suffolk County librarians and may serve as an example of how reference questions are handled in general.

We limit ourselves, at this time, to paintings and painters. The reference questions can be systematised into five aspects of the subject:

A. Biographical information.
B. Identification of a painting or its subject.
C. Location of painting.
D. Value and appraisal.
E. Where to sell, where to buy and, possibly, how to be more involved.

A. Where to look for biographical information on a painter:

"Patron bought a painting by W. Coty and would like some information about him or her." One of our libraries sent this question. It gave us a good deal of trouble. We searched systematically through the following reference sources held at the Patchogue Library:

Mallett's index[1] is our primary tool. Now over thirty years old, the two-volume index is held by many libraries in the county in the Peter Smith edition reprinted in 1948. Chamberlin[2] warns us of inaccuracies, but we feel all libraries would do well to have it available for their patrons to give them an idea of how much information is readily available on an artist in question, provided he was actively painting at the cut-off date in 1935. If no biographical information was then available, Mallett will refer us to an art gallery where the painter exposed, or to a society of which he was a member which, in turn, might be able to provide some information. For older painters the index gives limited biographical information: name, nationality, dates of birth and death, and the medium, if other than painting. A very useful item is the place of residence of artists who were alive at time of publication. Most places have libraries or are near to libraries, and this fact can save a patron a great deal of searching, especially if a letter to the library is returned with positive information.

But back to our detective work. No listing for W. Coty in Mallett. This, for the time being, eliminates our searching Benezit, Thieme and Becker, and Fielding, our most important biographical encyclopedias and dictionaries of painters, all indexed in Mallett.

After Mallett, we proceed to the *Art index*, a Wilson publication started in January 1929 and still going strong, or not so strong depending on how you feel about the periodicals indexed and the depth to which they are indexed. Looking up Coty is a time-consuming process. There are no cumulative volumes to speak of. Entries contain reference to an artist's style, to news of his exhibitions and other newsworthy items, all an indication of the artist's popularity in the art world, or his lack of it.

1. See page 4 for listing of biographical sources mentioned in this section.

2. Chamberlin, Mary W. *Guide to art reference books.* A.L.A., 1959, item 97.

The Who's who series is our next reference tool with which to pursue W. Coty. Neither *Who's who in American art* nor the British *Who's who in art* are of help, and similarly *Who's who in commercial art* and the *International directory of arts*. We are ready for our last general source, the *New York Times obituary index*. May we point out that not many of the 353,000 obituaries in the index are names of artists, but many of the painters who sign their names to a canvas are only weekend artists, some as famous as Mr. Churchill or Mr. Eisenhower.

Not having found our painter, we proceed with the specialized encyclopedias mentioned in Mallett, just to check on the inaccuracies. We plod through Benezit, Thieme and Becker, Vollmer, Fielding, Bryan, and other dictionaries of art at the Patchogue Library published since Mallett. If as in the case of the now oft-repeated W. Coty, we find no verification, we can only assume that we are dealing with a local artist with a limited reputation, or that the name has not been correctly copied from the signature on the canvas. We will return the question to the issuing library with a record of the sources searched, a series of zeros in front of the abbreviations of reference tools, cluttering up the reference form probably beyond recognition. We hope that when you receive the question you will not give up. We would suggest you contact the patron and find out more information. Where was the painting obtained? Perhaps on a trip to Maine or just found in the attic. If you could convey to us the style of the work for dating purposes, whether a landscape or an abstract. All this saves us time. If the patron is interested enough to give you more information, you might suggest that he photograph the painting, with a close-up of the signature, if there is one.

With this added information, even if we do not verify the painter in our reference sources, the search can be productive. A question sent to us illustrates this point: "Patron needs biographical information on the American artist Robert Wood. All she knows is he paints landscapes and seascapes, and his work is exhibited in galleries in Huntington and

Hempstead as well as Manhattan." We were only able to tell the patron that reproductions of Wood's work were available through the Donald Art Company and the International Art Publishing Company. We found the addresses and hoped that the patron or the requesting library will write for more information. It may result in direct contact between painter and patron, with first-hand answers to questions.

We would like to make a point on the inadequacy of our collections. We mentioned that the *Art index* lists exhibitions which are reported in art periodicals. These exhibitions more often than not prepare catalogues. These are very emphemeral as a rule, but a gold mine on the work of an artist. A student wanted to compare American painting in the 1960's with Russian painting in the same period. The public catalogue was of no help. Rather than look through the *Art index*, we quickly searched the art vertical file at Patchogue Library and found an exhibition of contemporary Russian paintings which were sent to the United States and other countries by the Russian government. The Italians compiled an illustrated catalogue, all in color. Patchogue Library subscribed to a service from Worldwide Books which supplied us with about $2,000 worth of material on contemporary art from all over the world. This service proved too expensive. But we were surprised how often patrons asked for information on contemporary artists when they found entries in the public catalogue leading them to this special collection.

List of works consulted in this section:

Art index, v. 1 January 1929 to present. Wilson.

Benezit, Emmanuel. *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*. . . Paris, Grund, 1948-1955, 8 volumes. "A completely revised edition covering Eastern and Western biographical work on painters with one exception, the New York school, whose fame had hardly begun when Benezit finished. Many artist signatures are illustrated,

the only work besides *Who's who in art* readily available for the purpose.

Bryan, Michael. *Bryan's dictionary of painters and engravers* 5 volumes, Kennikat Press, 1964; reprint of the 4th edition of 1903-04. Quick source for lists of artists' work.

Croce, George Cuthbert and Wallace, David H. *The New York Historical Society's dictionary of artists in America, 1564-1860.* Yale University Press, 1957. Some 10,000 names of artists active within the present continental limits of the United States prior to 1869 are listed. It is quite comprehensive.

Cummings, Paul. *Dictionary of contemporary American artists.* St. Martin's, 1966. Who's-who type of information for 700 artists, with a bibliography and locations of some of their works. Since these are active artists, the information is already inadequate.

Fielding, Mantle. *Dictionary of American painters, sculptors and engravers.* Struck, 1945. Originally published in 1926, most useful for post 1860 material. Contains addresses of artists alive in the early twenties.

Foster, J. J. *Dictionary of painters of miniatures, 1525-1850.* Burt Franklin, 1926. Many artists did both original miniatures as well as reproductions in miniature of famous paintings. It should not be forgotten that some miniaturists painted also non-miniature works.

International directory of arts. Berlin, Deutsche Zentral-dueckerei, 1969-70. International in scope, listing only names and addresses which are useful in answering questions where patrons want direct contact with the painter.

Mallett, Daniel T. *Mallett's index of artists; international-biographical; including painters, sculptors, illustrators, engravers and etchers of the past and present.* Bowker, 1935.

Supplement. 1940. Both volumes reprinted in 1948 by Peter Smith.

New York Times obituaries index, 1858-1968. N. Y. Times, 1970. Useful even for those libraries which have the complete, or as complete as possible at present, *New York Times index*, which, however, lacks obituaries during 1913-25 period.

Thieme, Ulrich and Becker, Felix. *Allgemeine Lexikon der bildenden Kuenstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. . .* Leipzig, Seemann, 1907-1950. Chamberlin[1] considers this set the most complete and scholarly with its 37 volumes and lengthy bibliographies and locations of art works. It is available in German only.

Vollmer, Hans. *Allgemeine Lexikon der bildenden Kuenstler des XX. Jahrhunderts. Leipzig,* Seemann, 1953- . 6 volumes. Supplements Thieme's work; a continuation of 20th Century artists.

Who's who in art. Biographies of leading men and women in the world of art today. Artists, designers, craftsmen, critics, writers, teachers, collectors, and curators with appendices of artists' signatures. 15th edition. London, Art Trade Press, 1970. Appears every two years. Very selective for all its long subtitle. British and European oriented. About 4,000 names, with about 600 monograms and signatures of painters. First edition appeared in 1927. All volumes should be retained.

Who's who in American art. v. 1, 1936- Bowker, irregular. All volumes should be retained, but no complete set exists in Suffolk, as far as we know. Current issue contains over 5,000 names.

Who's who in commercial art. Art Director's Institute. First edition, 1957. Gives minimal information about the artist, his address.

1. Chamberlin, Mary W. *Guide to art reference books.* A.L.A. 1959. item number 225.

B. Finding the name of a painting or its subject:

Sometimes, a patron knows only the name of a painting and something about the subject: "Can you supply a picture of a painting or it may be a sculpture called 'The end of the trail' or 'Trail's end' by Henry Poore. There is also an artist called Henry Varnum Poor. We don't know which one painted the picture in question of an Indian sitting on horseback, tired out at the end of the trail, or is it a sculpture?"

Searching for well-known paintings by title or subject is relatively easy. In searching the above question, we were able to verify both subject and painter as well as the medium. It turned out to be the painter, Kenneth Frazier. After returning the question to the requesting library for further information we found that the patron wanted a local artist to copy the painting of the Indian. In this case, sending the patron the address of the firm which sells large size reproductions would have been superfluous. We had a problem to find a circulating copy of the book containing the painting. We hesitate to send Central Book Aid reference books out of the Patchogue Library in cases like this. The local artist would take some time to finish his work.

Again, perhaps, it would help if we cited some of the sources which might answer questions when we know the title and subject of a painting. The two indexes by Monro, see below, are the best starting points for this type of question. They, obviously, contain other information besides this:

Bartram, Margaret. *A guide to color reproductions*. Scarecrow, 1966. Contains some 8,500 names of works of art.

Clapp, Jane. *Art in Life*. Scarecrow, 1959. Lists titles of art works appearing in *Life* magazine from its first issue in 1936 through 1956. Supplementary volume under the same title was published in 1965, indexing illustrations of paintings in *Life* during 1957-63 period.

Ellis, Jessie C. *Index to illustrations.* Faxon, 1966. A marginal source for indexing paintings by title, but useful for those appearing in *American heritage, Connoisseur* and art books, some not indexed anywhere else.

Encyclopedia of world art; McGraw-Hill, 1968. Volume 15, the index, has titles of works of art by very reputable artists, held mostly in museums. Good for answering questions on religious subjects such as "a famous painting of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, with a light shining on him as if a spotlight."

Havlice, Patricia P. *Art in Time.* Scarecrow, 1970. Similar in scope to *Art in Life*, indexed by title of painting from 1923-1969.

Monro, Isabel S. *Index to reproduction of American paintings.* Wilson, 1948. Don't look for anything contemporary in this guide to pictures indexing more than 800 books equally difficult to obtain. Entries are by author (painter), subject and title. First supplement is more useful, issued in 1964 by Wilson, indexing some 400 books.

Monro, Isabel S. *Index to reproductions of European paintings.* A guide to pictures in more than 300 books. Wilson, 1956. Same format as above.

UNESCO. *Catalog of reproductions in color of paintings before 1860.* Paris, UNESCO, 1968. And its companion volume, *Catalog of color reproductions of paintings 1860 to 1965.* Paris, UNESCO, 1966; small black and white reproductions of paintings indicating where color reproductions can be obtained. Good for title verification of paintings on school assignments.

C. Location of painting:

Patrons ask about location of paintings for a variety of reasons. They might want to visit the gallery or merely send to it for a reproduction of a painting they admire. Others might want to buy, but want to know if any museums have done so already, to be reassured that the painter is a worthy investment. Some high school students feel that location of a painting is an important aspect of their assignment, as the following reference question indicates: "Information on the life of B. E. Belman, an American artist. The patron thinks he was listed in *Who's who in America* for 1938. She would like to know where his paintings are hung." Mallett's *Supplement* confirmed that there was information about the painter in *Who's who in America*, 1938 edition. Mallett mentioned that the artist lived in the Bronx at the time. We also found that the patron reversed the given names of the painter and other sources confirmed this, giving us his place of birth in Palestine in 1898 and noted that his paintings were hung in New York City high schools, giving specific titles and names of high schools. This, in turn, will send us to other volumes of the WPA era since the state guide books mentioned works by artists who were decorating buildings under the New Deal program.

The following reference works give locations to paintings:

American library compendium and index of work art. American archives of world art. 1961. Contains some 30,000 works in architecture, sculpture, painting and minor arts in a systematic, chronological-geographical order. It gives present locations and answers those questions on relatively unknown artists in terms of a well-known contemporary.

Art index, Benezit, Fielding, Mallett, Monro, Thieme and Becker, the UNESCO *Catalog of color reproductions*, Vollmer, *Who's who in American art* all list locations to some extent. So do the Baedekers.

Braider, Donald. *Putnam's guide to art centers of Europe.* Putnam's, 1965. An index of artists refers reader to those European museums listed under city where a work by a given artist is to be found. This is where tourism and art meet.

Cartwight, W. Aubrey. *Guide to art museums in the United States*, East coast, Washington to Miami. Duell, 1958. Contains an index of artists and museum holdings. One of a series.

Faison, S. Lane. *Art tours and detours in New York state.* Random, 1964. Most useful for tourists who wish to do some museum crawling, especially during an unexpectedly wet vacation.

D. Value and appraisal:

Kovel, in the preface of his *Complete antiques price list*, which every library should have, states that antiques are a matter of supply and demand. Their current high value in dollars might have something to do with inflation. Paintings are also victims of fashion. This does not necessarily mean that the old painting above the mantle by an unknown local artist will be accorded the same price inflation ratio. But for a variety of reasons a patron will want to know its value. However, not all will be that candid, especially if they need cash. Instead, patrons will ask about Long Island artists, or American artists in the early 20th Century and earlier if they feel that their decorative piece above the mantle looks weathered enough. When this is reflected in your reference questions, we send you books as asked only to find that the patron has discovered little about his particular problem. There is unfortunately, no Sears mail order catalog for paintings. The best we can do is follow auction catalogs or dealer price lists in art periodicals. We list a few sources available at the Patchogue Library:

Art at auction. Studio, 1969. Selection of sales at Sotheby's and Parke-Bernet, compiled annually. First-rate, expensive items.

International art sales, annual review of painting, ceramics, furniture, glass, objets d'art. Studio, 1961. Expensive items. Index of painters with a list of their works and the price paid for them. Lowest item is about $500.00.

Kovel, Ralph M. *Complete antiques price list*; a guide to the 1969 market for professionals, dealers and collectors. Crown, 1968. Buy at least the paperback edition and buy it annually. It has over 28,000 items, but only 35 were paintings ranging from $5.00 for a 1933 "winding mountain stream."

Something on appraising: The library is not qualified to appraise paintings, however sorry you may feel for the patron

who lugged his painting to the reference desk. We can give him a recent copy of the *Membership directory* of the Appraisers Association of America. Write for a copy. Sometimes they send it free. The names listed in the directory are qualified people who will evaluate art objects for a fee. Their addresses are given and their specialities. Patrons might contact them by letter for an appointment. The yellow pages of the *Suffolk telephone directory* lists some members of the Appraisers Association, a point antique dealers are proud to advertise. You will find them listed under Antiques. Kovel and other writers on antiques will not, as a rule, answer letters seeking appraisal information; nor will museums.

E. Where to sell and where to buy and how to be involved:

It is useful, when asked for information on where to buy a painting or how to sell one, to find out whether the patron has "a one shot item" or whether his interest is academic. If academic and the patron wants to be involved in a study of a particular aspect of painting, the McGraw-Hill *Encyclopedia of art*, all 15 volumes--especially the bibliographies--will be of great help. Next the telephone directory with its listings of antique shops to visit. Roaming auction houses and galleries and asking a lot of questions at these places can be an effective way to learn about the hobby of buying and selling paintings and other art objects, as well as reading books in your art collection. Do not forget the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, a sure guide for involvement with people of similar interests. The following list of reference tools will aid your patron:

Artists/USA 1970-71. Buyer's guide to contemporary art. First edition, Artists/USA Inc. 1970. Excellent for painting created now. The illustrations are in color. It is the closest thing to a mail order catalog of painting we know. Besides the illustration of a painting, we are given the painter's address, his gallery, awards and the price of the painting pictured. Nothing prevents the patron from writing directly to the painter and ordering a similar work, within a particular price range. An oil of Mr. Nixon by Morris Katz sells for $350.00. If a patron cannot afford a Wyeth, a painter of similar style can be found for $500-$800.00. All regions of the country are represented, both objective and non-objective paintings.

Coysh, Arthur W. *Buying antiques reference book*. Praeger, 1968. Lists collections of English antiques in museums and galleries; includes addresses of clubs and associations to join and write for information.

Hobbies magazine has a section under painting which usually contains advertisements for paintings wanted by antique shops and art galleries. These lists asking for works by certain painters are a good indication of what is marketable at the

moment., Patron can always send photographs of items he wishes to sell either to the galleries which advertise or advertise himself and await offers.

Art news. One feature of this periodical is a section: Coming auctions. Coysh, in the Preface of his book tells us how to become experts in the "world of antiques:" "They take every opportunity to see and, if possible, to handle, fine specimens of the class of antiques they have chosen for study. They read extensively about their subject and build up their own store of reference books. And they talk with other specialists and discuss their problems. . ." Going to auctions is one way to achieve Coysh's aims.

It is possible for us librarians to assist this process by providing the books for the amateur collector. Too many of them are being misled by fakes and forgeries and waste their money, as Coysh points out.

We started with somebody called W. Coty. He was not found in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art library. Incidentally, we have ordered the Metropolitan Museum's multi-volume catalogue which will improve our verification. As our bibliographical sources improve at the System and at Patchogue, our art reference will continue to open beyond our geographical limits. We have also contracted with the New York Public Library for information services. If we do not find the answer, we try to suggest where a patron might write. You can follow this up. If that particular avenue proved to have been a cul-de-sac, let us know and maybe we can find other roads. But our greatest problem remains: What does the patron really want and if we know why he wants it, that too can help. You can help us most since only you are in the unique position to find out what the patron wants to know.